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ABSTRACT

Analysis of values, values transmission, human development, and Catholic social theory can increase effectiveness of parental involvement in Catholic education. Values are interpreted to include fundamental criteria which give meaning and order to life. Although values are transmitted by numerous sources including the family, social groups, religious institutions, and schools, religious and secular research indicates that parents are the primary educators of their children. Catholic parents will be more effective as values transmitters if they familiarize themselves with Catholic social theory and with values research. Catholic social theory stresses the need for organizations of Catholic parents to work closely with religious education programs. Secular research organizations provide information about values transmission from the perspective of modern social science. Parents must also realize that participation in their childrens' education will change as their children develop from total dependence at birth to relative independence at maturity. The conclusion is that Catholic parents can become more effectivel/ involved in education if they form coalitions with like-minded parents and community members, encourage plurality of thought and action within coalitions, familiarize themselves with Catholic social thought, and become informed about values research. (DB)

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WHY PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT?

By Bruno V. Manno, Ph.D.

Address given before a general session of the National Forum of Catholic Parent Organizations (NFCPO) of the National Catholic Educational Association on Tuesday, 28 March 1978, 10:15 am to 12:00 noon, in St. Louis, Mo., in the Cervantes Convention Center.

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I want to begin my presentation with a definition and a warning. The definition concerns what I think we are about during this Convention--namely, adult education. Now, keep in mind this definition I propose is not what some call academic. It makes sense to me though, and my intuition is that it will make sense to you. Adult education is what happens in the home when parents have teenage kids. And as much as we may not want to admit it, it's not only the teenage kids who get educated!

Much of the education we receive as adults is in the school of "hard knocks". It is there we get on the job training in crises management as we move from one crisis to another. All of you in the audience who either have families or work with families know what I mean.

Settings like this Convention offer an opportunity to reflect more critically on important issues in Catholic education. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you and thank those responsible for inviting me and giving me the time to share with you some thoughts on "Why Parental Involvement?".

Now, to my warning--and I consider this a double-barrelled warning. If you haven't already guessed from hearing my name and looking at my features, I want you to know I am of Italian descent. I think all of you should further know I value that heritage, embrace it in different ways, and on

occasion, flaunt it. I was not born in Italy, but my father and his parents were. My mother was the first in her generation to be born in this country. For better or worse--and I think for better--I come to you with a certain set of biases, presuppositions, beliefs about family, family life, politics, etc. that come from this ethnic heritage. I make no apologies for this. To paraphrase the wisdom of Mark Twain, the worst thing you can say about Italians is that they are members of the human race just like the rest of us.

I open with this comment about ethnic heritage so as to legitimate a point I want to make--all of us have these basic biases, presuppositions, and beliefs through which we critically view and understand reality. Though we may not be conscious of them, it is important to surface and keep them in mind as we look at some of the issues we discuss in this session.

In my presentation I intend to state my biases. These are not off the cuff remarks but are arrived at by examing and critically reflecting on my own and other's research in the areas of value development, ethnicity, and what I like to call the Catholic social theory.

My emphasis on pluralism and diversity of perspective is not to say there is nothing we hold in common. It is only to say there are undoubtedly some differences in the way we view things, especially when it comes to questions of

concrete strategies or styles. My ethnic instincts lead me to say that's okay. When properly nurtured, pluralism leads to responsible freedom and the potent use of power, not the death of factional divisiveness. Perhaps we can re-do Mark Twain once again and say the worst thing you can say about any of us is that we are all members of the human race! We Italians are fond of being known as one of the crazier card-carrying member groups of that human race and enjoy our participation in what we call la dolce vita.

Now to warning number two, also connected with my ethnic heritage. Whenever you put an Italian up on a platform with or without a microphone--and we Italians don't really need microphones because we've all got tremendous vocal cords--you take a risk. The risk is that we all begin to stray from the platform where we are told to stand. At any moment we may begin to wave our hands and arms acting out symbolic gestures-- of all types, I might add--and then finally and just as suddenly break into an aria from some opera. I promise to contain myself and hope that you do not say of me what one Shakespearian character says of another in Richard II, "His tongue is now a stringless instrument." (Act II, Sc.I)

In the time allotted to me I will examine three questions I think need to be discussed when looking at parental involvement and parent organizations: 1) What are values and how are they transmitted? 2) Do present-day theories of human

development and the life cycle offer a basis for developing a spirituality for parenting? 3) Does Catholic social theory offer any broad guidelines or directionalities that need to be kept in mind in putting together parent organizations?

There is a two-fold logic to these three questions. The questions are, first, a movement from a discussion which is somewhat theoretical -- values and values transmission -- to more practical concerns -- putting together parent organizations. Second, I have focused on three words that are connected with the National Forum of Catholic Parent Organizations (NFCPO) -- Parent, Catholic, and Organization. For me, parent correlates with my discussion of value transmission, Catholic with developing a spirituality for parenting, and organization with the guidelines that arise from a knowledge and understanding of Catholic social theory. All this is to say the droppings of this mad Italian have a logic and method to them.

QUESTION I: WHAT ARE VALUES AND HOW ARE THEY TRANSMITTED?

During the course of an ordinary day people constantly respond to situational demands by making decisions about actions they will or will not perform. The word "values" refers to those criteria or standards which form the bases for our everyday decisions. Values then are criteria or standards in terms of which decisions are made. They are

affirmed and cherished fundamental priorities.

A commitment to a system of fundamental priorities -- e.g., justice, hope, trust, etc. -- results in a general set of ethical principles -- e.g., act in ways which are just, hopeful, trusting, etc. These ethical principles guide and help us discern specific ways of responding to the concrete demands of a situation where a decision needs to be made.

The common statement, "That person looks at the world through rose colored glasses" illustrates how values function in human life. Values shade and color the way people look at the world and deal with others. It seems some use rose colored glasses while others always use dark sun glasses -- they are called bosses!

The Latin word from which our word "value" derives illustrates how values effect us. The literal meaning is to be strong for a particular purpose. Values give us the strength we need to accomplish a goal, an ambition or some other important aim.

Our everyday language also conveys this idea. After doing something we didn't think we could do we often say, "I was amazed at how I somehow found the strength and courage to do it." Our values provide us with the strength and courage we need to do what at first may seem impossible.

Religious values are those criteria, standards, or priorities which put us in touch with the transcendent source of all that exists. They are not something added or

on to human life. They are al the core of what life is really all about. From the Catholic Christian perspective religious values are those human values which call us out of our own self-centeredness and invite us to trust other people. They give us the power to become more than what we are and direct us to all that is good and ultimately of value to us as humans -- the mystery of transcendence we call God.

The refrain from a song written in 1931 entitled "As Time Goes By" provides a helpful summary of our discussion thus far. The refrain says, "The fundamental things apply as time goes by." Values are those fundamental criteria which give meaning and order to life. As time goes by they can be applied over and over again to many different and changing situations.

How Do We Learn To Value?

We learn to value in two ways. The first is more formal. We are told or taught by means of precise verbal instruction that certain things are right and certain things are wrong. In this way, information is imparted, and we learn to skillfully perform or avoid performing certain actions.

There is another, more informal way we learn to value. Let me tell you a story to illustrate this point. A person wanted to teach a parrot how to say hello. After trying unsuccessfully for several days the owner became very angry at the uncooperative parrot. He reached into the cage,

choked and throttled it and threw it out of the house into the back yard chicken coop for the night.

The next morning the owner went to the coop to retrieve the parrot and make one final attempt at teaching it to say hello before sending it to parrot heaven. He walked into the coop and was shocked to see all but one of the chickens dead. This last one was being choked and throttled by the parrot who was heard saying, "Say hello, say hello."

The point of the story is obvious enough. What the parrot learned from the owner was a behavior, and that's another way all of us learn to value -- by observing, imitating and internatlizing behaviors. Values then are often caught as well as taught. They sneak in through the back door when we are least aware we are "teaching" anything.

This fact is especially true of young children who are particularly prone to imitate other people's behavior. For those who don't believe this, I urge you to listen to Ogden Nash who said: Oh, what a tangled web do parents weave when they think their children are naive.

In brief, then, values are both taught and caught. We are taught them and catch them and teach them and throw them in various communal settings. The most important communal setting within which a foundation is laid for the development of an adult value perspective is that one called the family.

Why is this true? Quite simply, we are all able to

choose our friends or if clever enough escape those who are driving us crazy, but we neither escape nor choose our own families. My mother always said, "You're stuck with us, so learn to live with us." To paraphrase a familiar statement, for better or for worse, whether rich or poor, until a person goes out on his or her own, people are stuck with and begin to develop their value system in the family setting.

The research being conducted on how value patterns are transmitted make this point clear. For example, the work of Thomas Juster of the National Bureau of Economic Research suggests some people are more economically successful in later life because of closer and more intense attention received during early childhood. The research of the Reverend Andrew Greeley and William and Nancy McCready of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago shows people get their fundamental religious outlook from their parents, especially the father. Religious socialization, then, is primarily a paternal process. On the other hand, the mother is a more effective agent of political socialization and also has more religious influence on the father than he has on her. This research further demonstrates the close connection between being socialized into a religious meaning system and into a particular sex role.

The Greeley-McCready research also discusses the role ethnicity plays in influencing the transmission of values.

Its somewhat tentative but nonetheless important conclusion is that ethnic heritage seems to have an independent influence outside the family socialization environment.

As tentative as some of these findings may be, this research is important in a number of ways. It is certainly important to the nation at large as it begins to take a long, overdue look at national soical policy and family life and neighborhood revitalization. It is certainly important to the American Catholic community as it begins to grow up adult and confront the new questions and new agenda inaugurated by Vatican II. And much more to our interests here today, is of major interest and concern to any group that claims to be a National Forum of Catholic Parent Organizations (NFCPO).

From my perspective, this research, taken from both secular and religious standpoints, is the best rationale available for justifying parent organizations and parental involvement in parent organizations. This is so because it substantiates from the perspective of modern social science a fundamental belief of Catholic educational philosophy -- parents are the primary value educators of their children.

This research also challenges us to face up to some hard questions that need to be reflected upon by this group. Here are just a few:

--Have you looked at and studied this research?

--Is it an important source of information in your

--In what ways are you supporting and encouraging more research in these areas?

--In what ways are you twisting the arms of Catholic Universities to do research in these areas?

--What are the implications of this research for the public policy issues NFCPO wants to positively influence?

There are numerous other points that could be made and questions that could be asked. I invite the panelists present to come up with more questions as well as suggest some answers and future directions, no matter how tentative they may be.

QUESTION II: DO PRESENT-DAY THEORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE LIFE CYCLE OFFER A BASIS FOR DEVELOPING A SPIRITUALITY FOR PARENTING?

Being parents has always been a challenging business. In our day and age it is especially challenging.

The popular musical Fiddler on the Roof is a story about some of the conflicts and challenges facing two Jewish parents as they try to raise three young women in a changing world. Tevye, the father, offers an insight into how many people feel about their parenting experience. He opens the story by saying by saying, "...in our little village of Anatevka you might say everyone of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck." He pauses thoughtfully for several seconds, and then with a twinkle in his eye bellows out in a

deep, rich voice a further reflection combining both the pain and joy of many years of education in the school of hard knocks: "It isn't easy!"

As it was for Tevye, parents today find themselves trying to scratch out a pleasant simple tune without breaking their necks. The name of the tune is Living a Decent Life, and as a parent recently said, "It not only isn't easy, all I ever get is grief and more grief."

The pain and grief experienced by parents often leads to some questions being asked about their situation. On a bad day one of the most frightening questions is always, "Why did I ever get into this?" On a good day the question remains the same, only you don't break into tears after asking it.

To return to our second question, I think present-day theories of the life-cycle do offer a basis for developing a spirituality for parenting. Let me briefly expand upon this.

From the life-cycle perspective, at the heart of the parenting experience is a basic tension between wanting to control and learning when to surrender, between wanting to hold on and learning to let go. This tension, a normal one, is what leads to growth. The question underneath much of this tension parents experience is this: how am I to express the care and concern I have for what I have created, for what

I have generated?

Since growth in the family is from total helplessness at birth to relative independence at maturity, the care and concern the parent manifests for the child must become more and more intangible. At eighteen no one wants to be driven to the dance by Mom or Dad. What is appropriate at one point no longer is.

Now, if this is the parenting experience described by life cycle theorists, does the Catholic, Christian symbol system speak to this experience? There are several answers possible to this question. Let me briefly outline two related ones.

Being parents is dying to old self in very concrete ways. The Scriptures invite us to die to the old self. On the other hand, we are assured that death is only another passage, for in dying to the things of old, we experience new life.

It is appropriate here to describe and refer to the Christology found in the letter to the Phillipians 2:6-11. It complements the idea of dying to the old self and moves it in another direction. In it Christ Jesus is described as having emptied himself. To talk about self-emptying is to talk about the everyday experience of human relationships and in particular, parenting. It is to talk about the everyday journey and the everyday passage from death to life, from wounding to healing, from dying to rising.

What the Catholic, Christian symbol says about good parenting is that it is biodegratible. It has a built-in disappearing dynamic. The best gift parents give to children is a set of wings with which to fly away, to fly the coop! The Catholic, Christian symbol system transforms this experience of death and joyfully announces out of death to the old self comes life -- the life of parents seeing their own care and concern endure and be transferred to new relationships.

As I ended my first section with an invitation to the panelists, I end this section in the same manner. I invite you to reflect theologically on your experience of parenting. What of the Christian symbols, what of the Christian texts, and in particular, what of the Scriptures speaks to your experience of parenting?

QUESTION III: DOES CATHOLIC SOCIAL THEORY OFFER ANY BROAD GUIDELINES OR DIRECTIONALITIES THAT NEED TO BE KEPT IN MIND IN PUTTING TOGETHER PARENT ORGANIZATIONS?

The best way I can share with you my insights into what Catholic social theory involves is by telling you two stories. One concerns my grandfather--Grandpa Vic--and the other concerns my recently deceased 95 year young grandmother--Nona Angela. Their lives were imbued with and governed by the basic tenets of Catholic Social theory. I know, though, as I say this, they are listening to me while enjoying the

delights of the so-called beatific vision and wondering, "What the hell is he talking about?" They would both phrase it just that way with my grandfather's version having a few juicy expletives deleted if it was to be repeated in public. Now to the stories.

Politically, Grandpa Vic was a loyal, staunch, card-carrying Democrat. After said Democrat found himself caught in a political situation which demanded a quick but thoughtful reversal of what hitherto was an unchanging position, he would shrug his shoulders and say, "Well, there's nothing more durable then the provisional." An interesting reflection on the need in this life and perhaps even in the next for flexibility.

Nona Angela came to this country many years ago. When asked where she wanted to live her response was, "I really don't care as long as I can walk back and forth to Church every morning."

Those two stories get to the heart of Catholic social theory and its belief in smallness, flexibility, provisionality, malleability, changability, negotiability, compromise, consensus, coalition building, and even big city machine politics. It stresses decentralization, local autonomy, freedom of choice, and voluntary association. The Catholic social theory is summarized well in E.F. Schumacher's phrase "small is beautiful" and Andrew Greeley's phrase "no bigger

than necessary".

Its three basic tenets are personalism, pluralism, and the principle of subsidiarity. Personalism involves a stress on accessibility and face to face contact. It affirms the fundamental dignity of every person. On a concrete level it means, that when there is a hole in the street which by-passes your house that needs repairing, you can call up the precinct captain you know on a first-name basis and rest assured it will be repaired. Pluralism affirms there is more than one way to skin the cat -- and on one is begrudged for using and taking advantage of all the options.

Subsidiarity is a principle of justice that views society as essentially a community of communities--diverse, interrelated, interlocking, small as well as big. This community of communities:

1) strives to achieve a common good based on social justice and
2) acts out of social charity.

No large community or institution in the hierarchical ordering of the common good should perform a function that a smaller one can more adequately perform. Hence the phrases -- small is beautiful and no bigger than necessary.

All of the terms referred to above point in the direction of affirming the need for Catholic parent organizations working closely with Catholic schools and other out of school religious education programs.

Originally I was asked to speak about the "Do's and Dont's of Parental Involvement". It is only within the context of what I have said thus far on values, spirituality, and the Catholic social theory that I now venture to offer some suggestions on do's and dont's.

1.) Do form coalitions of like-minded people both within and outside of the NFCPO (e.g. Candlelighters, handicapped, etc.) around specific issues of concern, but don't limit your activities to coalition building and lobbying efforts.

2.) Do give people room to think differently on questions of concrete strategy, and don't preach that those who disagree with the "official party line" stand in peril of losing their immortal souls. The Catholic social theory allows for plurality of thought, especially when it comes to concrete strategies.

3.) Do encourage persons other than parents with school age children to become part of your organizations. There are plenty of former parents, non-parents, as well as non-Catholics who believe in what you are doing. I am waiting for the day when some Roman Catholics begin to organize those older Catholics that are officially part of the group we call "Senior Citizens" into Senior power groups. Do especially invite these seniors or elders into your group and use the free time they have for writing letters, making phone calls, testifying, babysitting, etc.

4.) Do flaunt your Catholicity and your Catholic tradition when it comes to affirming your right to talk about public policy issues, and don't get caught without having done your homework.

5.) Do be open to various styles of involvement on the part of your membership, and don't get too hung up with organizational structures. Some people like to meet in homes in groups of ten while others like meetings with 200 people there. Some dislike meetings all together but love to make phone calls. Everyone has a resource that needs to be tapped. Do tap and use all these resources.

These are only a few ideas. I once again invite our panelists to offer more suggestions.

Let me now conclude with a brief reflection on family life and parish life.

CONCLUSION

Since around the year 1500 many fundamental changes have taken place in that entity called Western society. A silent one we have yet to really ponder in its full implications for present-day and future living concerns what Christopher Lasch calls the attack on disease and the rise of the new religion of health. This attack has had unbelieavable demographic effects. As a result of this and other changes too numerous to mention, that social unit called the family experienced and continues to experience various stresses and strains. (How old or new these are is a point outside the bounds of our discussion today.)

Present-day research by persons such as Lasch point out that while there have been and continue to be stresses and strains on the family as a social unit, the family is not dead. As a matter of fact, the family unit is enduring remarkable well.

Now, permit me to ask this question about some of the present-day stresses and strains the family is undergoing and enduring: from where do they come? In part, I think some arise from an overburdening of expectations--that is, oftentimes, too much is expected of that social unit composed of parents and children that we call family. This is especially true when it comes to developing the skills necessary to learn two things:

1) what it means to say forever--this is the issue of permanent commitment;

2) what it means to share an identity--this is the issue of intimacy.

When it comes to these issues my hunch is that if not always, then at least for a great part of humanity's history, people reflected on the issues of permanent commitment and intimacy and the relationship between the two.

Today, though, the modern health and demographic revolutions put these issues in a different context. It boils down to this--when someone in 1978 says forever to an intimate relationship, he or she does it --or at least should do it -- knowing that he or she will probably live to be 75 or 80. In the history of humankind, this is a whole new ballgame, a ballgame that demands we begin to develop ways of coping with this different situation.

Let me make two suggestions here as to how we may be able to relieve the family of this overburdening of expectations and help to develop better skills in working through some of the problems connected with life-long intimate commitment in today's world. The first suggestion concerns the parish, and the second pastoral ministry-- what the parish is all about.

I begin with an obvious enough statement. I think there is a need for the individual family as a social unit to relate to other types and forms of community life. Let me be more specific here. I am talking about relationships that are informal, non-rational, local permanent, and loyalty-based -- patterns of relating that are fostered in real neighborhoods. These relationships give members of the family unit some breathing space -- both psychically and physically.

It is at this point that various voluntary organizations (e.g. Knights of Columbus, the Hibernians, etc.) and in particular, the parish, become tremendous resources of support, encouragement, challenge, and release. My conceptualization of the parish is in terms of the so-called extended, intergenerational family model, from which are removed some of the obvious archaisms and shortcomings.

A parish community is intergenerational in nature. It has the past represented in its older members, the future in its younger members, and the reality of the present in those who are somewhere in the middle, either as parents or single people. This, of course, should not be seen as a rigid categorization.

At the core of this intergenerational approach to parish is a team of official intergenerational ministers, both clerical and lay (to use the terms with which we are most familar) who take what people like Mary Durkin and John Shea call a skills approach to pastoral ministry.

This approach to ministry see three skills as essential to pastoral parish-based (or for that matter--anywhere based) ministry. These skills relate to the three basic components of parish life.

Components:	Skills:
Religious symbol system--that is, the Catholic Christian tradition	Theological--give ministry its specific religious dimension
People	Helping
Programs	Programming

Now, I want to let you in on a secret: you who are members of and involved in parent organizations are part of the ministry team I want to call parish. You may not be officially recognized as of yet, but I think you should be.

This intergenerational approach to parish life and this skills approach to team ministry views parish essentially as a larger community of diverse, smaller, subsidiary communities united around the Lord Jesus. The parish, then, becomes a place where we tell our stories and share our burdens on any number of levels. In doing this we come to appreciate the commonality of our predicament as what Jack Shea calls "middle people". He says:

> Our beginnings are not wholly our own. Our endings will most likely be beyond our control. We are middle people. (STORIES OF GOD, p. 11)

Yes, we are middle people, middle people on our way to an unimaginable future that far transcends our present conceptualizations, as important as they are. But in telling our stories and in listening to other people tell their stories in that intergenerational caring community called parish, we are affirmed in our belief that there is more to life than meets the eye, a Mystery that enlives our middle people status. From the Catholic Christian perspective, that's the way things <u>really are</u>, and that's the Good News that gives us the hope and courage we need to continue our everyday passages and journeys from life to death to life and so on. END